364 sections and especially around the market. Now formal regulations require the inhabitants [232] to dig latrine ditches in the compounds, but it will be a long time before the native loses the habit of relieving himself in the open air.

Chapter 15

Mossi Dances and their Significance (1)

1. An excerpt, revised and completed, from a lecture delivered by the author on December 24, 1926.

535 In this chapter, we shall describe the Mossi dances, explain their meaning, and tell of the old beliefs with which they are connected.

Indeed, these dances occupy a place apart in the general category of dances of indigenous peoples.

The latter, for the most part and notably among the Boussancé and the Gourma [Gurma], are only exuberant displays, sometimes exercises in suppleness, sometimes caricatures of the motions of love.

The Mossi dances, on the other hand, are actually performed in accordance with fixed rules. There are three types: 1) dances which we shall call sentimental, known as wennega; 2) dances that are part war dance and part religious, called waongo; and finally 3) funeral dances known as warba.

535 533 832 In order of precedence, let us begin with the love dance called wennega. This is executed at gatherings. The lover and his sweetheart -- the latter dressed in black, the ceremonial color -- are receiving their friends. Beer is flowing, and mouths are filled with kola nuts. Soon the musicians strike up [234] their [534] rustic guitars (kondé) which are accompanied by the beating of gourds. The women sing:

539 533 M' Ba sida talem néré
Talem kan-kaĩn, talemti
Pagh ka zaĩd koulogh wa mandé

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And you do not want to let her go!
Are you perchance this child's mother or father?
You are not the God who created her."

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The wennega consists mostly of back-and-forth movements of the hips in slow rhythm. Various figures are performed, but there is always the same rhythm and the same swaying of the hips. The sweetheart herself begins to dance, a curious fact, since women do not usually take part in the men's dances.

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We have noted that another form of Mossi dance is religious, the waongo. The waongo is a mysterious being, half animal, half spirit.

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Origin of the waongo. Tradition has it that this being was one day found all alone on a plain. Those who first saw him took fright and ran away. They went to tell the village elders, who assembled a goodly number of young men, armed [236] with arrows and sticks, to overcome this strange being.

He was not found at the place where he had first been seen. He had moved some distance away. The villagers surrounded him, and the elders, who had brought him a rooster, began to question him: "If he should be taken to the village, would he hurt the villagers? Would he bring misfortune?" The chicken was then sacrificed, but it is told that the sacrifice was not accepted.

The elders returned to the village and brought back a white rooster (norapelga), a he-goat (boéga), and a dog (bâga). Then they addressed the waongo, saying: "We were perhaps mistaken just now. Perhaps you wanted an animal in addition to the rooster we offered to you? If, by becoming our guest, you can bring us happiness, good health, and children, accept these offerings!" They slaughtered the rooster and the goat and killed the dog. This time the sacrifices were accepted.

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What the waongo is. The waongo consists of a mask, usually representing the head of an animal, and a bindou (a kind of long cloak made from the bark of the béringa shrub which is soaked in water for a long time to blacken it or from baobab fibers).

773 According to tradition, he had beside him a toabga (a kind of
●535 magic axe) and a tibo (a sacred object, fetish).
776 The people captured him and put him in a safe place. But of what possible use could he be to them? Nobody knew. [237] He was something unknown and fearful.

One day the people had gone off to hold the kouré (funeral observances) of an old man and were on their way back home. They were warba dancers. They were all singing as they approached the house of the waongo, who came out. The dancers were terrified and ran away. Only one of the singers had the courage to remain behind.

He went on with the songs and the waongo followed him right up to the house of the deceased, and there he began to dance.

From this it was concluded that the waongo had something to do with funerals. Since that time the waongo is summoned whenever an old man or woman of the Nioniossé (soukoaba) dies. He never dances for deceased young people.

Since the waongo or, rather, the soukou is considered to be sacred and to embody a sort of religion which possesses secrets
[198] that should not be made known to everyone, a special language -- a deformation of the môré [Mossi] language -- has been invented. It is understood only by the initiates.

535 The waongo dances to the sound of a special tom-tom, accompanied by songs and praises in the secret language. The dance is of no special interest; it involves more or less frenetic movements, such as characterize most of the dances of the indigenous peoples.

The waongo is always accompanied by a circle of young men dressed in a narrow strip of cotton, decorated with cowries, and carrying satchels at their sides. These boys make movements with their heads which [238] are precisely like those made by circus
[534] horses. In addition to the tom-tom, flute players (wissé) accompany the dances.

535 We shall now speak of the true funeral dance, called warba.
764 It is performed by men wearing skirts, a kind of net shirt dyed blue, and headdresses made of cowrie shells. A long fringe, weighted

535 764 with metal and worn around the hips, distinguishes this costume from others. The movements of the fringe follow the movements of the body. It soon is revolving so rapidly that it looks like a top.

Many people, however, do not own the special costume just described, and they merely tie a blanket around their loins. During the movements of the dance, this produces a very comical effect since it looks like the wagging tail of a monkey.

[534] The musical instruments which accompany this dance are long tom-toms (gangando); some of them are narrower at the middle and look like long, thin spools for thread.

The dancers also accompany themselves with tiny metal instruments which are like Spanish castanets.

The dance itself is performed in a circle under the direction of the chief of the warba whose costume is [239] richer than the others. All of the dancers usually wear many charms on their [789] heads (tail of an ox and heads of birds stained with the blood of sacrificed chickens).

[775] The warba proves that the Mossi believe in the immortality of the soul. They believe that the dance is necessary to enable the soul of the departed to join the souls of his ancestors. They hope in this way to earn the good favor of the new spirit.

Thus, this dance has a moral basis. However, it seems that the same cannot be said for the other dances which are performed so widely today.

535 In addition to these three national Mossi dances, there are some other dances performed only by women and girls which are actually exercises in physical culture rather than true dances. We shall speak only of the principal one, the kiguibtobo ("dance of the bumping buttocks").

The kiguibtobo. This dance is performed by a group of women, usually at the beginning of cool weather after the harvests are in. The dancers clap their hands while singers raise their melodious voices. The dance is rhythmic. Two dancers leave the group and take their places in the center of the circle. They go back and forth, and then suddenly at a given point in the song [240] they turn back to back so that their buttocks touch and bump each other in time to the music. The dancers must be equally strong

535 or there will be falls which are inevitable when one of the girls is too robust.

535 539 Here, chosen at random, is one of the kiguibtobo songs:

M'Ma ho, kà M'Ma warla y e
Lebin wa regh'big' tim boudguin
n'di Mossa yarbate ribo

"Mother, oh, my mother,
Come quickly and take my child,
For I am going to the next village
To consume pitilessly the goods of
these wretched Mossé." (1)

1. Mossi.

[241] Chapter 16

Agriculture

241 787 Selection of land to be tilled. As he is wont to do in all important matters, the Moaga entrusts to a soothsayer the responsibility of choosing the land to be cultivated. In actual fact, he chooses it himself, but the diviner must tell him whether or not it is haunted by spirits and what sacrifices are advisable to protect him from evil spirits.

The soothsayer always warns him of the presence of spirits (kinkirsi) and prescribes the necessary sacrifices and alms.

241 782 Sacrifices. The new occupant calls for the head of the family or, if he is a Nionioga, for the Tengsoba, who is in charge of sacrifices. The following sacramental words are pronounced: "A zaguel tib reg' noag'la zom kom kon Naba zidwende, tib kon zig'tinguin damba, tib kon timpelem, tib kon yaramba, kon saramba, tib reg'kon zig, kinkirga ta wa me nan baou ki, on -- on tib reg'koin gnimassem, lass' pogh'banga, lasse zoug'banga, naore banga ..." Translation: "On the part of X, I offer this rooster and this water with flour to the sun god (Zidwendé), to the

304 wound with warm water which often is not scrupulously clean
752 since the gourd in which it is kept is not always washed. The
[278] wound is dusted with a charred substance (made by burning the bark or leaves of the baguem-baga plant) mixed with karite butter. It is bandaged with a leaf from the kantonga bush, tied on with a bit of thread. Once the wound has begun to heal, it is wrapped in cotton strips. The water used to wash the wound is thrown into a hole that is covered with a stone.

304 Special language of the kéogo. In order to prevent the Moaga
198 (here meaning an uncircumcised person) from understanding what is said within the kéogo or between the boys and the guards, a special language has been developed. Some of its words are as follows:

Water (kom in ordinary Mossi language), hargo;
Millet cake (saghbo in Mossi), lâbo;
Sauce (zindo in Mossi), kirou;
Fire (bougoum in Mossi), nionom;
Beer (dam in Mossi), sonnom;
A robe or blanket (fougou in Mossi), pilli;
Mat (pinri in Mossi), wanghé. [268]

304 Distinctive attire of the circumcised boys (bankoanga). His
292 costume, wallimba or zougba, consists of a fringed loincloth with pockets. He carries a rough stick (zâbré) with which he hunts rabbits and other small game.

He accompanies his evening dance with an instrument called
304 wassimba, a curved stick on the end of which are strung four or
293 five pieces of gourd, roughly circular in shape, with holes bored through them.

304 Tom-toms. The bankoensé (newly circumcised boys) dance
534 to the beat of two drums like those used in the warba and waongo
535 (see the chapter on native dances). The drums are called gangango when they accompany other dances, but here they are called gallyans.

304 Prohibitions in the kéogo. A Moaga (1) is strictly forbidden

1. "Moaga" is used here in a pejorative sense and means an uncircumcised man.

1: Delobsom--162 I-5 (no date) 1933 FA28 Mossi FA28

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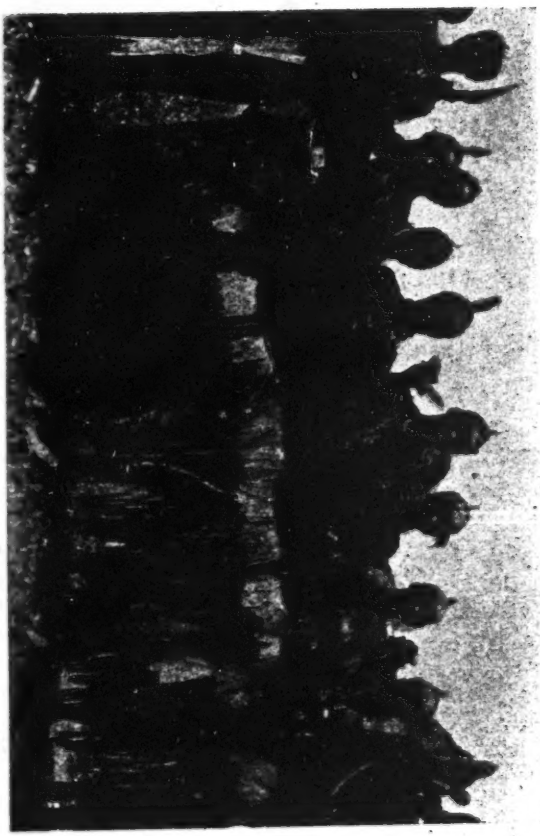

Mossi Warba Dancers.

From the Mission of the White Fathers at Ouagadougou.

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The Large Mossi Drums.

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Dance of Young Mossi Girls.

857 The young Mossi, like children in our own country, like to play.
524 Babies have bone hatchets on which they chew; little girls have wooden dolls, and on important feast days they hand them out graciously with a curtsy; whoever takes the doll must give the child a few cowries when he returns it. The boys mold horses, saddles, and horsemen in clay and draw figures in the dust with their fingers, just as we at the same age used to make mud pies and draw funny figures in the margins of our spelling books. Of course, all this is done rather crudely, but it shows that human beings are the same and have similar tastes all over the earth.

857 All children like noise, and the Mossi are no exception. When
534 the stalks of millet are still green, they fashion a kind of harmonica with a vibrating tongue made of a piece of millet stem tied with a thread; or they cut a millet stalk in two and hollow it out, leaving a mere slat which vibrates under the repeated blows of a stick. The sound is augmented by a broken gourd that serves as resonator. These are expendable toys which are thrown away the following day when they have dried out, but it is so easy to make more! The children
857 also make straw rings which are usually worn around the wrist as
524 bracelets, but which may also be used in a game. They are placed on the ground before the players who take turns rolling one of the little hoops. If the ring falls on that of another child, the player who propelled it wins the hoop; if it falls at a certain distance, it is won by the opponent; and if it rolls past that distance, the throw must be repeated.

524 The older boys and the men have more complicated games. They have a kind of checkers; the board is formed by making small holes /in the ground/ by hand, and the pawns are represented by
525 stones. Above all, they have the cowry game, a game of chance, a game of winnings and losses, and like every gamble involving money, a thrilling game. Those who take to it go as far as their European counterparts. They become cheaters, liars, thieves, and indebted. Some have gambled away everything up to their last pair of trousers, their last breechcloth, and have ended up gambling themselves away. This game should be forbidden as strictly as our own games of chance.

535 The game of games, the pastime of pastimes, that which is resorted to on every occasion, happy or sad, and sometimes without any special reason, is the dance. If the Mossi happened to know her, the muse Terpsichore would have no more devoted followers. No man, woman, or child can remain still when dance music fills the air.

535 /38/ To tell the truth, however, the Mossi do not know how to dance. With the exception of the circumcision dance and of some villages of dancers where people devote themselves methodically to choreography, the greater part of the population do not know how to dance gracefully. This does not prevent them, one and all, from indulging in the dance. Men and women dance separately. The most common male dance consists of a rapid motion of the upper part of the body, from left to right and right to left; the feet do not leave the ground, and they are moved forward very slowly. The arms are bent up to shoulder height and away from the body; the fingers are extended, and arms and hands shake along with the rest of the body. When performed by professionals, who are sometimes found in the villages, this motion is rather graceful but lacks breadth of style.

[292] The dancers wear a cardboard headpiece, its crest adorned with a band of cowries and its sides often embellished with bits of mirror fragments, feathers, and all sorts of small, gaudy articles. The upper part of the body is covered with a tight, wide-meshed garment, decorated at the waist with pompons or cowries and small bells. The dancer wears [301] on the middle finger a piece of iron which looks like a large clam shell, and on his thumb an iron ring. He strikes one against the other in rhythm. His wrist is often adorned with a bracelet made of several of these iron shells; hanging from them are small strips of the same metal which clang at the slightest motion. Those who do not have a costume deck themselves out in tawdry finery.

The women dance two at a time, each by herself, spinning around and assuming whatever poses they consider most graceful. When they come near one another, they turn around and strike their backs together; then one of the two withdraws, and another takes her place. All the while, the women spectators clap their hands in rhythm and sing. Sometimes one of them utters a shrill cry to arouse the dancers or to laud one who has proved unusually graceful and lithe.

[831] There are no special dances for the dead, and Mossi dances apparently do not have the obscenity of some Negro dances.

857 But to return to the children. It may be stated, as a general rule, that children can do as they please as long as they help out with everyday tasks, as long as the son helps his father and the daughter her mother. Happily there are exceptions to this, and some parents watch their children quite closely, but these are exceptions. Boys 593 prefer their mother to their father, because the latter must often

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Mossi Dancers.

Mossi Dancers.

304 day the one in charge of the circumcision, a wealthy Yarga or Mossi
563 who has the means to feed several of the people to be circumcised,
852 chooses a tree to serve as shelter for the operation. Rain need not be taken into account, for circumcision is always performed during the dry season from December to April, when agricultural work is at a standstill. The tree is surrounded with straw mats, forming the téoo
[778] or sacred enclosure which no one who is not circumcised may come near without running the risk of being insulted and often beaten; if he should dare to step inside it, he would be stricken by the greatest misfortunes. The Peul sets out a flat stone, sacrifices a chicken in order to make the spirit of the tree benevolent toward those to be circumcised, and operates on the boys one by one. Drums are played throughout the operation to drown the cries of the victims.

852 For three days afterwards the newly circumcised boys do nothing. They rest and tend their wounds. They remain isolated from the rest
[535] of the community for two or three months, sometimes even longer. Judging by the dances which close the festivities, dancing must be their primary concern during that period of time. They also thresh the millet of those who invite them to do so, but no uncircumcised person may join them, no uninitiated individual may come near them.
[198] They do not speak the Mossi language at this time, but a special tongue of which they learn enough to serve them in their everyday needs. Woe to those who forget and use their native tongue; they are
[551] beaten with switches made of a kind of willow. Even their names are changed, and no one may call them by their Mossi names.

The circumcised boys are divided in two groups, one "male" and one "female." One of the groups bears the name of the hyena (kwara in their language) and the other is called masalro, whose French equivalent we do not know. The hyena group must strain their wits to snatch food, even from the other circumcised boys, who are kept constantly on the alert. The other group makes improper gestures during the dance.

852 The circumcised boys are covered with gray dust to alter their
293 appearance completely. A tail is fastened to the back of their breech-
776 cloth, hanging to the ground. It is made of plaited cotton thread and
481 ends in a pompon. Its function is to drive off the kikirsi spirits, who apparently do not like circumcised persons. The boys walk bent over and leaning on sticks like old men. This is done to test their obedience and to see if they listen carefully to what they are told.

852 shaved strips on top of the head, while the sides are shaved similarly
[302] in semi-circular strips. On the seventh day, people who were previously circumcised bring chickens to sacrifice to the spirits of the paths so that all will go well, but the newly circumcised take no part in the proceedings. The children wash, oil themselves, and put on their
852 beautiful clothes. Everything is brand new, the breechcloth, the
292 trousers, the shirt, the blanket, and the headgear. The belt is adorned
301 with a knife in a leather sheath and with a needle case which has at the end a tuft of leather strips with cowries attached to them. They
[776] hold a cow's tail, also adorned with cowries, to drive off the scheuyan spirits who dislike little rascals and people who dress too well. Both wrists are adorned with copper bracelets. Needless to say, this flashy new outfit with its cowries that clang like bells lures the eye and bewitches the young boys, who decide to be circumcised at the first opportunity so they too may eat well and wear beautiful clothes.

852 /44/ The circumcised boys continue to walk bent over, leaning on
[48] their sticks, but their crude staff is replaced with two sticks decorated with burnt designs and tied together. They no longer wear a tail. They go to greet the chiefs, and they thank those who have given them gifts. They walk to the sound of the large drum, since the bindré is forbidden at circumcision ceremonies, and sing plaintive chants to the spirits. They parade in the marketplace and display their clothes in the villages. They dance before the chiefs, and their dances are very
[535] graceful indeed. They dance in unison to the beat of the drum, making the same gestures all together or two by two, varying the figures in accordance with the beat. After seven days the festivities are over, and they all return to their families and take up everyday life as though nothing had happened.

We shall now study this everyday life.

/45/ BOOK III. DAILY WORK AND TRADES

Chapter 1. Occupations of a Mossi

221 The Mossi are essentially cultivators, and it may be said that no
241 Mossi who works at a trade will fail to cultivate his fields when the

754 accused of eating the souls of little children, and I have known some who boasted of possessing this power!

The tibo are a family of sorcerers. People are born tibo, and the village they inhabit is called Tibin. The naba of this village has the special faculty of discerning all sorts of things, especially whether someone has an enemy, merely by gazing into a gourd filled with water in which a certain charm has been placed. A chicken was previously sacrificed on the gourd. This naba, and he alone, can also kill at a distance. To obtain his protection, it is necessary to bring him a goat, a chicken, millet flour mixed with water, and millet beer. Sooner or later the one designated will die! If it takes too long, the sorcerer always has an excuse handy..

754 778 The village of Tibin contains a hut where the tibo fetishes are lined in a row. These fetishes consist basically of clay pots containing water, branches, and tree leaves.. They are covered with clay gourds of the kind used to cook sauce, and the sacrifices are made on these gourds. It is said that there are snakes and turtles in the pots, but only the tibo sorcerers can see them. Every village has its tibo jar in the naba's household, either at the door of his hut or hanging inside. These tibo are the dwellings of powerful kikirsi.

754 771 535 /106/ The bartibo are professional dancers. They have the faculty of distinguishing while dancing those who have the power of killing people, whether poison-givers or seuya. The bartibo themselves claim to have the power of riding the wind and going to kill anyone they wish. They specialize, however, in child-bearing charms for the benefit of sterile women.

754 292 The waongo also belong to a special family. People are born tibo, bartibo, waongo, or nyonnyonga. For their ceremonies, the waongo don garments made of the bark of baobabs which cover them completely. These strange garments completely conceal the person. A figure may be seen walking, but the person cannot be recognized, and a dreadful illness threatens those who dare to strike it. This is why people, when they see these shapeless forms, run away as fast as they can.

[761] The waongo wear masks when they celebrate the kouré (death anniversary) of another waongo. They can ride the wind and inflict diseases; they can even kill if they wish.

789 791 777 If someone tells you that you own many animals, or that they are very handsome, this gives bad luck, as you know. So, to ward it off, /593/ you grasp your grigri by slipping two fingers into the iron hook and two others into the curve of the horn, and then you hang it in your hut, or better still, you hang it from the neck of one of the threatened animals.

789 791 755 11. A small turtle completely enclosed in a small leather bag along with a powdered aquatic leaf called kouri. If you have a stomach-ache, you cover the flat side of the object with butter and rub your stomach with it.

789 791 832 12. A small piece of wood covered with lizardskin in the middle and leather at the ends and prolonged at one end by an iron tip. If one wishes for the favors of a woman who refuses to grant them, one comes near the cruel woman while gripping the grigri in the left fist, its tip pointing up. At the same time, one presses the woman's hand tightly with the right hand. This method of seduction is claimed to be infallible.

789 791 754 13. A koba horn covered with leather and prolonged at the broad end with a chicken foot. Inside, the horn contains rice, salt, and soumbara. If you were threatened by a spell performed against you, you would slip the horn upon your head, with the thick end between the eyes and the pointed end behind the head. Then you would have nothing to fear.

14. A deer horn containing barkoundi leaves and closed with a lid adorned with a cowrie.

To prevent a sorcerer from eating the soul of a third party, you lift the lid with the aid of a knife covered with karité butter, you take with this knife a little of the contents of the horn, and you spread it on your forehead.

535 532 575 In addition to the bara and timisoba, the Mossi also have ouango. "The ouango," says Marc (op. cit., pages 152 and 155), "are dancers whose costume consists of a huge liana robe which covers the entire body and which is surmounted by a wooden mask painted red and black and usually representing /594/ the head of an animal. The ouango are members of a rather mysterious brotherhood. They have a special language, and the Mossi believe that anyone who says a word

535 while the ouango are singing will surely die within the year. (The 532 ouango sing at the funeral ceremonies of important personages, at the 575 second ceremony performed a month or a year after the burial). The masks of the ouango are made in the greatest secrecy. They have to be carved out of a single piece of wood, and the man who is making one must not be seen as long as his task has not been completed.

535 "In our opinion it would be most interesting to try and study 575 the ouango and their customs more closely than we succeeded in 171 doing. We believe, indeed, that theirs is a very old institution 174 antedating the arrival of the Mossi in the Volta basin, an institution which they found among the peoples they conquered and which they preserved, no doubt because they did not dare fight it. Ouango are to be found throughout Gourounsi territory, and the dou noticed by Binger among the Bobo would seem to have the same origin. The dancers with totemic masks who appear in some of Desplagnes' photographs are quite similar to the Mossi ouango."

The Mossi ouango are thus no different from the Bobo dou, the Khassonké mamadiombo, the Habé and Bambara namakoro, the Malinké dokho, the Landouman /Landuma/ simo, etc.

173 The Earth chief or Tensoba is also part of the Mossi priestly 174 organization. We are already familiar with Earth chiefs, whom we encountered among the Gourounsi. They exercise no political authority in the village, but they are entrusted with the performance of sacrifices to the Earth and to other local divinities.

The presence of those Earth chiefs among the Mossi is no doubt to be explained by the superposition of the conquering group over the conquered group. When the Mossi invaded and conquered the country, they placed their own men at the head of all the villages and all the cantons in the course of conquest, /595/ to ensure the submission of the vanquished population. They never felt, however, (and they hold this in common with the rest of West Africa) that they were themselves qualified to offer sacrifices to the Earth and other divinities of the place. Only the vanquished, former owners of the latter and on good terms with it, were qualified to do this. The former autochtonous political chief thus naturally became a religious chief under Mossi authority. We have already seen that the Moro Naba